



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**EIGHT FORMER SOUTHWEST AIRLINES EMPLOYEES
CHARGED IN FRAUDULENT TICKETS SCAM**

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton and Federal Bureau of Investigation Special Agent in Charge Manuel E. Mora announced that in El Paso, eight former Southwest Airlines employees face federal wire fraud charges in connection with a scheme to steal in excess of \$1 million from the airline.

A federal grand jury indictment returned last week charges Richard De La Paz, Jr., Michelle Christine Torres, Denise Nunez, Oscar Enrique Ortiz, Melissa Rene Lampton and Barbara Ann Wilson with conspiracy to commit wire fraud and three substantive wire fraud charges. In addition, Salena Corinne De La Torre and Guillermo Enriquez are charged with three counts of wire fraud.

The indictment states that from March 2000 through January 2003, De La Paz, Torres, Ortiz, Lampton, Nunez and Wilson sold passenger tickets at SWA's El Paso, Texas, station. During the course of business, used SWA tickets collected by agents are supposed to be placed in envelopes and sent to the company's accounting firm. The indictment alleges that the defendants intercepted used airline tickets and reused them in subsequent cash ticket transactions. After the transaction, the defendants would pocket the cash representing the value of the used ticket. While not charged in the conspiracy count, the indictment further alleges that De La Torre and Enriquez carried out the same scheme independently during their tenure with Southwest Airlines; De La Torre, from February 2001 to July 2001 and Enriquez, from January 2000 to August 2002.

Authorities are looking for Lampton. The remaining defendants are all in federal custody. Upon conviction, each defendant faces up to five years in federal prison and a maximum \$250,000 fine per count.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant United States Attorney William F. Lewis, Jr., is prosecuting this case on behalf of the Government.

An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law.

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